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STEPHEN THE DARK TOWER ~THE GUNSLINGER~ KING



THE MAN IN BLACK

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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain is the last gunslinger of the line of Arthur Eld. He pursues a being called the Man in Black who Roland believes holds the key to his destiny to reach the Dark Tower and prevent its destruction.

At a way station in the Mohaine Desert, Roland encounters a boy, Jake Chambers, who becomes his companion on his quest. Through an Oracle's premonition he learns: The boy is your gate to the Man in Black. The Man in Black is your gate to the three. The three are your way to the Dark Tower.

Though not understanding the full implication of those words, Roland and Jake continue through the endless wastes of the Mohaine Desert. Their journey takes them deep inside the Cyclopean Mountains, where the two become separated. Lost, scared, and alone, Jake unknowingly lights a fire with devil grass which leads to a side effect that he is not prepared to face; Jake is taken to a past Mid-World. There, he catches a glimpse of the Man in Black, but soon realizes he faces a graver danger...

Roland remains on his belly until after the cave stops shaking. Rocks tumble down all around him, but miss hitting him direct, so *that's* something.

He don't know what caused the explosion that set everything to falling. Don't much care, neither.



No, as he relights his flint and steel, only one thing's on his mind.



Jake!

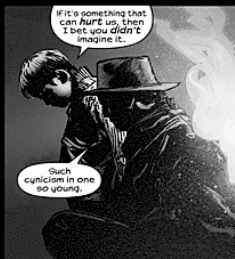
Jake, can you hear me?



Jake!

R-Roland?





Meanwhile a distance away that's growing shorter all the time...

...the Man in Black, looking decidedly real, solid, and not at all magical...

...is trying t'keep a few steps ahead of 'em.

Poor Roland keeps trying to anticipate what I'm going to do to destroy him, and he still doesn't understand...

...that he is his own worst enemy. My "primes" are pale, puny...

...unimaginative... almost benign compared to his.

And yet he keeps convincing himself it is otherwise, including trying to guard the child he will inevitably destroy. But he considers me to be the villain--

You!

What do you want? How dare you block my path!

Sorry, m'lord, but... the mutants...

They're hungry. We're hungry.



And of what concern is that to me?



The humes following you... one big, one little...

Ken we eat them?



The boy... the little one... yes. But not the big one.



Ah, Roland, if only you knew it was me and not your beloved Tower shaping your destiny...

My lord...?

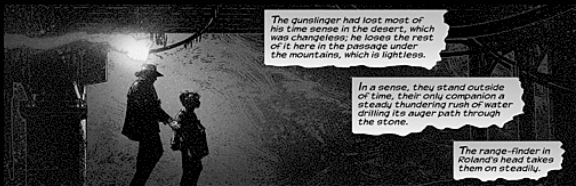
What? Is it? NOW?

Are you sure we cannot have the big one, too?



Trust me, you wouldn't want to eat him.

He's rather... tough.



The gunslinger had lost most of his time sense in the desert, which was changeless; he loses the rest of it here in the passage under the mountains, which is lightless.

In a sense, they stand outside of time, their only companion a steady thundering rush of water drilling its auger path through the stone.

The range-finder in Roland's head takes them on steadily.



We'll have to put out our torches soon to conserve the light.



Well, sure, because, y'know, haunted tunnels in pitch blackness... what could possibly go wr--

Whoa!



Watch your step.



Time to take a break, I think...

Good a place as any. Although I keep being worried a train's gonna come tearing down here and just, y'know, flatten us.

Not much chance of that, I guess.

Very little.





An explanation of sorts, as my tutors explained it to me when I was about your age.

Hard to believe you were ever my age.

It *does* seem implausible. Anyway...

...think of Mid-World as a circle.

Within this circle were twelve Portals, each of which led into and out of Mid-World...

And each Portal was connected to its opposite number by a magnetic Beam.

Oh, I get it! Like the north and south pole.

If you say so. And each of these Beams served to hold Mid-World together.

Through time, space, size and dimension, they kept the worlds aligned... but separate.

Now each Beam is overseen by a pair of animal Guardians...

Okay, you're losin' me again. Animals? What the--?

Forget the animals. Just know this:

The Tower is the Linchpin. The nexus of the Portals.

All worlds, all realities, are contained within it. Only from there...

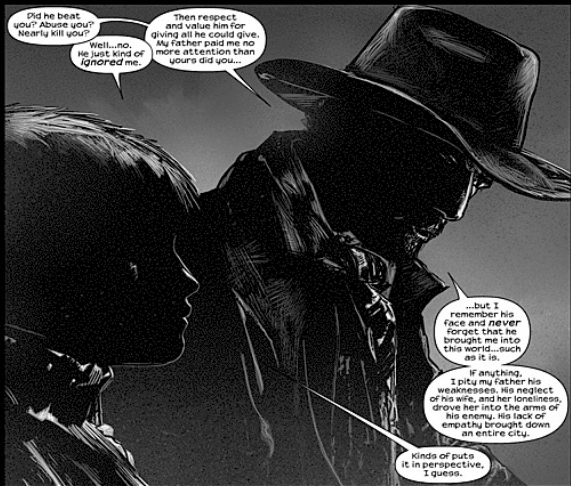
...can history be rewritten.





*Time passes, as it's wont to do.
Fortunately the tunnel walls are
studded with phosphorescent rock,
giving them something to see by.*

Can you tell me
something about your
friends, Roland? I mean,
whatever you *had*, it had
to be better than me,
'cause I don't think Mrs.
Shaw the housekeeper
counted. And my father,
jeez, he never...



Did he beat
you? Abuse you?
Nearly kill you?

Well...no.
He just kind of
ignored me.

Then respect
and value him for
giving all he could give.
My father paid me no
more attention than
yours did you...

...but I
remember his
face and *never*
forget that he
brought me into
this world...such
as it is.

If anything,
I pity my father his
weaknesses. His neglect
of his wife, and her loneliness,
drove her into the arms of
his enemy. His lack of
empathy brought down
an entire city.

Kinds of puts
it in perspective,
I guess.

"I remember one Sowing Night Cotillion long ago...the Commala, some of the older folk called it...."

"What's a 'commala'?"

"It has many meanings, several of which intersect on Sowing Night. Cotillion, a very, uhm...romantic gathering. It refers to rice...."

"Rice and romance? Huh. Like when we throw rice at weddings?"

"You do? Huh. What a waste of perfectly good rice. Anyway, it also refers to the welcoming of spring...."

"...and also the steps of make-believe courtship during the Sowing Night Cotil. They made something decadent out of it."

"A play. A game, as the spring night sky would be filled with birds and bees...."

"Yeah, we have that, too. Birds and bees. Didn't know it was literal."



'It was for us. And the celebration in the Great Hall...it was all light, it was an island of light.



'No doubt somewhere in the vicinity, my lonely mother was finding comfort...where she should not.

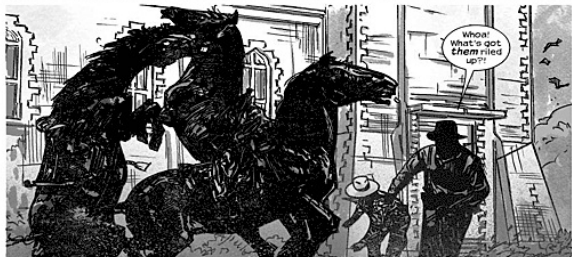


'As for me, I was there that night with two friends, Cuthbert and Alain. We weren't *supposed* to be there, because none of us had passed from the time of children.



'We weren't long out of our clouts, as the saying went. If we'd been caught, Cort would have striped us bloody. But we weren't.

'We credited our shadowy disguises, our painted mustaches, but we were just lucky.'





"It was all the distraction we required. Nine years old and yet the shadows were already our allies."



"We sprinted like the thieves in the night that we were..."



"...consumed with the joy of our own cleverness."



"Convinced, perhaps, that being witness to adult activities..."

"...made us adults by extension."



"We sneaked into one of the old balconies, the ones that were supposed to be unsafe and roped off. But we were boys, and boys will be boys, so they will."

"To us everything was dangerous, but what of that? Had we not been made to live forever? We thought so, even when we spoke to each other of our glorious deaths."









...that
she would
lose.

What hand
could have held
the knife that
did my father to
his death?



The lord of light
extinguished. His wife
would betray him, betray
his city. His best men routed,
he would crawl back to his
death in Gil-lead, courtesy
of Marten, with whom
Gabrielle danced.

And my friends--
none of them immortal,
as it turned out. They too,
died. The green and gold of
Gil-lead lives on only in my
memories...and perhaps,
in some small measure,
yours now.



And what
happened to
your mother?



"She was...**betrayed**
as well. She did...not
survive.

"I'd think...she would
not have **wanted** to.
Or I prefer to think
that, at least."







BETWEEN THE PAGES

Dear Fellow Constant Readers,

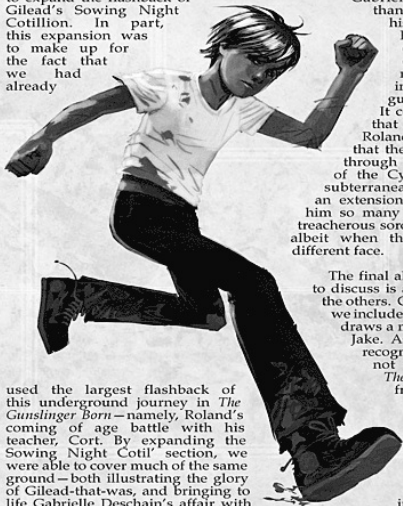
Welcome to the second issue of *The Man in Black*, Marvel's adaptation of the final two chapters of *The Gunslinger*. As longtime Dark Tower fans will recognize, this month's adaptation is, once again, subtly different from the original narrative. As always, our minor alterations are made with one goal in mind—to plunge you directly into Roland's reality and to capture the multi-faceted wonder that is Mid-World. We sincerely hope that we have succeeded in this difficult but rewarding task. In this month's missive I'd like to discuss some of our alterations with you, so that you can see the thoughts that go into our plot-building, and hopefully get a sense of what it means to travel with Roland.

The first alteration which longtime Tower fans will notice is the fact that Man in Black palavers with the Cyclopean Mountains' hungry mutants. In Stephen King's original story, we never see this palaver take place, though we can guess that Roland's enemy has—at some point—had truck with these most horrible of humanoids. Though in the original version of the tale Walter never gives the muties permission to catch and eat Jake, on a subtle level, our added twist is but another possible fulfillment of the promise that this evil sorcerer made to Roland before our gunslinger and his young



ka-mate entered the midnight tunnels. After all, didn't the Man in Black say that he and Roland would hold palaver on the other side of the mountains . . . alone? Though the Man in Black is Roland's quarry, he also strives to be Roland's puppet-master. He passes through the eternal darkness of these underground caverns unmolested, yet in his wake he leaves trap after trap. His ultimate goal? We can only guess that he wants to snare Roland's soul.

Another alteration we made to the tale originally told in "The Slow Mutants" and "The Gunslinger and the Man in Black" was to expand the flashback of Gilead's Sowing Night Cotillion. In part, this expansion was to make up for the fact that we had already



used the largest flashback of this underground journey in *The Gunslinger Born*—namely, Roland's coming of age battle with his teacher, Cort. By expanding the Sowing Night Cotil' section, we were able to cover much of the same ground—both illustrating the glory of Gilead—that was, and bringing to life Gabrielle Deschain's affair with her husband's treacherous sorcerer

and advisor, Marten Broadcloak. Although we no longer witness Roland winning his guns in this section, as we do in the book, we *do* sense that event hovering in Roland's future. After all, it was Gabrielle's affair that led Roland to break down Cort's cottage door and demand to take his test of manhood years before he was officially ready. (Roland wanted to win his guns so that he could shoot his father's betrayer through the heart. Unfortunately, the betrayer he ended up shooting was Gabrielle, not Marten.)

Although on one level it may seem strange that we dwell upon Gabrielle's affair rather than Roland's personal history, we believe that Roland's discovery of his mother's disloyalty was, in many ways, the most important event of our gunslinger's young life.

It could even be argued that Gabrielle's affair set Roland's *ka* in motion, and that the path he now treads through the eternal midnight of the Cyclopean Mountains' subterranean kingdom is but an extension of the path set for him so many years before by the treacherous sorcerer he now follows, albeit when that sorcerer wore a different face.

The final alteration I would like to discuss is a little different from the others. On page 9 of our story, we include a scene where Roland draws a map of Mid-World for Jake. As longtime fans will recognize, this scene does not actually come from *The Gunslinger* at all, but from *The Waste Lands*, which is Book III of the Dark Tower series. Since a long trek through unrelenting and unchanging darkness is much harder to depict in comics than in a novel, we thought that



this moment would provide a great opportunity for us to explain more about Roland's world view, a vision that he so often discusses in the prose of the original story.

In *The Waste Lands*, Roland draws this map of Mid-World for Susannah and Eddie Dean, just after Susannah has shot a giant but crazed bear that was about to swat Eddie out of existence. According to Roland, the bear was named Shardik, and he was not an actual bear at all but a cyborg created by the Great Old Ones—the same ancient,

technologically advanced people who built the underground tunnels that Roland and Jake now traverse. Before he went mad, Shardik's job was to keep vigil at one of Mid-World's twelve Portals, and to protect the Beam which originated there.

According to the story Roland learned when he was a child, Mid-World was shaped like a wheel. Around the periphery of this wheel were twelve Portals which led into and out of Mid-World. The endpoints of each portal were watched over by one of six pairs of animal Guardians: Elephant and Wolf, Rat and Fish, Bat and Hare, Eagle and Lion, Dog and Horse. Connecting opposite Portals were six magnetic Beams which crossed at the map's central nexus point—the location of the thirteenth and most powerful Portal, the Dark Tower itself. While the twelve lesser portals were doorways, the Beams were like invisible high tension wires. They affected gravity and maintained the proper alignment of time, space, size, and dimension. Their purpose was to bind the multiverse together while simultaneously holding the separate worlds apart. They also held the Dark Tower in place. In fact, the reason that the Dark Tower was beginning to falter was that the Beams themselves were beginning to snap. (In fact, Roland and his ka-mates experienced such a Beamquake just



after the fall of Gilead.)

Some people believed that the Portals, Beams, and Guardians were natural things, like the constellations in the sky, but others said that they had been created by the Great Old Ones who wished to remake the world. According to this belief, the Portal-and-Beam framework which held reality together was the Old Ones' final act of atonement before they disappeared from the earth. Although the Great Old Ones had been technologically advanced, they had also been violently destructive. Their wars and poisons had caused Mid-World's many mutations, and had almost brought the land to ruin. Some tale-tellers believed that

the Old Ones' Beams saved Mid-World. Others maintained that the Beams held the seeds for Mid-World's destruction.

The focus of Roland's lifelong quest is to reach the Dark Tower and to question whatever god or being resides there. He also hopes that when he reaches the Tower he will be able to rewrite history—both his personal history and the history of his land. Will he succeed? That I cannot tell you. But one thing I can say is this: Before Roland can change Mid-World's history, he must complete his present journey through the underworld, where all of his old passions, sins, and hungers lie in wait for him. We can only wait and see how he fares, just as we can only wait to see whether Jake escapes the clutches of the hungry muties.

Until Next Month—
Long days and Pleasant Nights!

Robin Furth



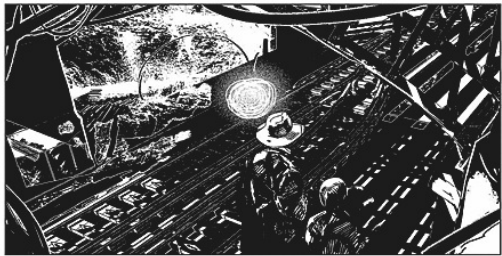
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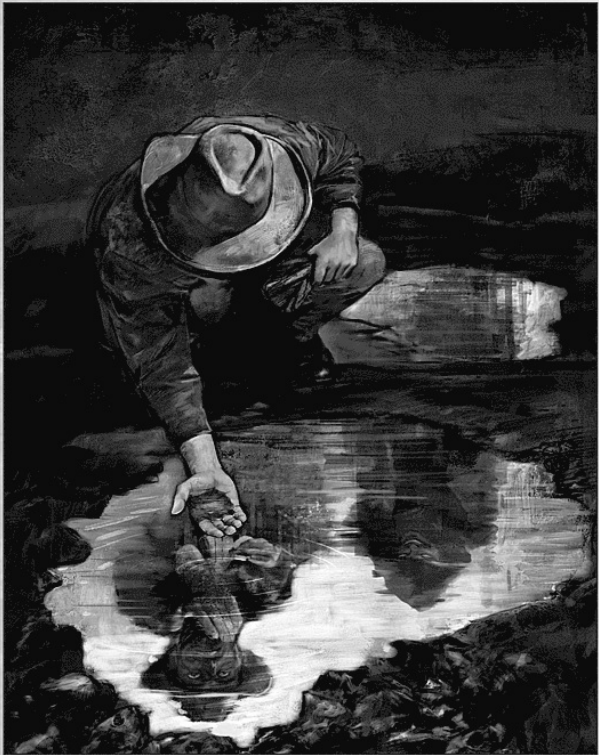
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COVER FOR ISSUE #2 SKETCH BY ALEX MALEEV



NEXT: "I BET YOUR OLD PEOPLE FOUGHT WARS WITH
IT. I BET THEY KILLED WITH IT..."





The Man in Black flees across the desert with the gunslinger Roland in close pursuit. In his travels, Roland has battled the possessed and the demonic, while meeting an unlikely ally named Jake Chambers, a young boy from another earth. Now, as the distance between Roland and the Man in Black diminishes, Roland is met with a chilling prophecy: he will find the Dark Tower and obtain his vengeance, but will pay for it with the blood of young Jake.

From the renowned creative team of Robin Furth, Peter David, Richard Isanove, and Alex Maleev comes the final chapter in the Dark Tower saga. With fantasy, horror, revenge, drama, and a dash of the Old West, such a story could only come from storytelling legend Stephen King.

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